

Theological.

SERMON.

"There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary be at rest."—Job xiv. 17.

Should one who has followed the gilded pleasures of this poor world, long enough to learn the genuine character of their insignificance, light on such a passage as this in any writing entitled to credit, he would doubtless pause, and fix his eyes upon it with peculiar attention; and we might reasonably expect he would utter a soliloquy not unlike the following: "Formed by nature for the enjoyment of social intercourse with my fellow creatures, when young I shot the shuttle of my hope through the web of fashionable mania connections, in order to weave the spotted garment of happiness. Destitute of malignant design myself, I suspected none in others. But, alas! I have paid the tribute of inexperience, and learned at length, by sad experience, that every brother will utterly supplant; and, where I least expected it, I have confirmed the prophecy of our Lord, 'a man's enemies shall be those of his own household.' When young, the streamers of honor, embellished with the stars of happiness, painted with all the fervor of youthful imagination, floated before my eager eyes; and for years did I expect that fortune would make me her minion. I followed the capricious Goddess, till quite wearied with her freaks, I discontinued the pursuit. Tired and jaded by former efforts, I would by no means renew them. Ten thousand disappointments have taught me to expect nothing from this insatiable world. She promises uncertain bliss, but gives me certain pain. My only wish at present, is to find some shady covert, that retiring from this barren heath, I might rest me there in quiet. I read here of a place where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest. Where, O where shall I find that enchanted bower? The grave! In the grave the good man finds a calm and welcome retreat from the cares and vicissitudes of this life."

We do not take it on us entirely to justify the temper in which Job uttered these words. Indeed, in the context, he speaks as though the tempter had taken the advantage of him, and, in the tempest of his soul, while groaning under the accumulated load of his unequalled afflictions, he thought of little but relief from his present sufferings. He knew that in the grave no pain is felt; and for the moment he scarcely looked any further. His present miseries made him think insensibility more desirable; though, in the next breath, he expressed a desire for an unshaken faith concerning the happiness of the eternal world. Abstracting, then, from the painful association of circumstances which led Job to utter these words, we shall regard them as pointing out, in a twofold figure, two characteristics of future happiness. The first is—

1. The absence of troubles or evil of any kind.

The second is—

2. Positive enjoyment.

This view of future happiness will not be uninteresting to any, who, aiming at the heavenly Canaan, have to march through this wilderness—the valley of tears. Have we not reason to believe that the wonderful power of association which dwells in the human mind, led our departed sister to choose these words as the foundation of her funeral discourse, by holding up the contrast between the sorrows of this world and the joys of the next? And the glory of Heaven, of which, through the merits of the Redeemer, she hoped to be a partaker? To contemplate the happiness of the next life, in connection with the termination of the afflictions of this, is certainly an association justified in Scripture. Not to mention the text, does not the Holy Spirit take this view of the subject in the Revelation, xivth chapter, 13th verse? "Blessed are they which die in the Lord from henceforth; yea, with the saints, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them." Again, in the viith chapter of the Revelation, and at the 16th and 17th verses, "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun shine on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Immediately after the text it is said, "There the prisoners rest together; they bear not the voice of the oppressor. The small and great are there; and the servant is free from his master." Indeed the highest possible idea of heavenly delight is given, where it is said, "These are they who came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

There seems to be something in the nature of spirit which leads him to regard with peculiar respect those joys which follow a course of laborious and manly exertion. The merchant who has made his fortune, and retired from business, enjoys, with heightened zest, the profits of his youthful toil. And the warrior delights to wear the garmented red in the blood of perilsous battles. Acquainted with this innate principle in man, the poet, when he would fill the mind with every idea of sublime grandeur, speaks as follows:

"There, on a green and flowery mead,  
Our warlike souls shall sit,  
And with transporting joy recount,  
The labors of our feet."

We have reason to thank God for our planting within us a disposition by which we are enabled to take up with the thought of those joys which follow a course of laborious and manly exertion. The merchant who has made his fortune, and retired from business, enjoys, with heightened zest, the profits of his youthful toil. And the warrior delights to wear the garmented red in the blood of perilsous battles. Acquainted with this innate principle in man, the poet, when he would fill the mind with every idea of sublime grandeur, speaks as follows:

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But we have no reason to confine the term, *wicked*, in the text, to wicked men, exclusively; but we may regard it as another epithet for what the apostle calls "spiritual wickedness in high places;" and, elsewhere, "the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience." For though the Devil frequently works by men, as agents, to discompose our peace, he has, also, other means. A wicked heart is in league with a wicked world; and sometimes Satan himself arms an arrow from his own quiver. In conflict with this three-fold troop, how often does the believer cry, "O, that I had wings like a dove; for then would I fly away, and be at rest!" Blessed citizens of heaven, banished, at present, to these dreary abodes of misery, death shall soon lend you the wings you want. Then shall you escape from this wretched world, in which you have lived only in submission to the will of God. Then shall you hide yourselves from the errors and the weaknesses of the understanding; and from the heart, that anxious seat of many tumultuous passions. You shall also escape from the snare of the Devil, and contend no more with his cruel devices. Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast."

If, but we said the second figure of the text pointed out a state of positive enjoyment. The word rest signifies ceasing from labor; and also a cheerful confidence in the promises and providence of God. "Return unto thy rest, O my soul," says the Psalmist; give thyself no uneasy doubt about the result of things, whilst thou art in the way of duty, "for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee." He hath been better to thee than thy unbelieving fears had anticipated in former straits—therefore, leave thy cease in his hand.

The word rest, also signifies the positive happiness prepared for the people of God. "There remaineth, therefore, a rest for the people of God." In what this rest shall consist, we know but in part. We have already observed, that it implies the absence of sin, temptation, conflict, persecution, pain, and reproach. These, however, are but the negative parts of that happiness. In what the full enjoyment of the soul shall consist, is a question which will not be completely developed, until we shall know even as we are known.

But with reverence, we may draw some inferences from eternal truth, which, at least, throw some light on the subject. In one place it is said, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord; yea, saith the spirit, for they rest from their labors, and their works do follow them." This verse not only declares that a holy life is necessary, to prepare men for the pure and spiritual joys of that high and holy place, but that the rewards of that state shall be proportioned to our advancement in holiness in this life.

This is confirmed by another passage; for, saith St. Paul, "One star differeth from another star in glory; so, also, is the resurrection of the dead;" and, saith Daniel, "they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars, forever and ever." The gradations of rank and of splendor unfold a character of eternal happiness, which are in exact but very imperfectly in this life. We are taught in another place, to contemplate heavenly happiness, in connection with the progressive endowments of the mind; "But we all, as with open face, beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory." It is thought by some, and not without probability, that the apostle refers to the privilege of the Christian, to grow in this world, and that he was drawing the contrast between the dark dispensation of Moses (at whom the children of Israel had to look through a veil), and the clear revelation of eternal truth, under the luminous dispensation of Christ, whose glorious perfections were openly displayed in the gospel, leading the believer from grace to grace, which, in that text, is called "glory," even till he attains that state of perfection, which may, doubtless, be extended to the progression that shall be realized, even in heaven. And how could we contemplate the glories of heaven in a more pleasing point of view?

There is nothing more grateful to the human mind than the idea of progress. There is a degree of delight, in ascending the successive swells of a cloud-capped mountain; there is still more in ascending the steep of moral and intellectual ascent. To the Christian, the state first desired of anything like intellect, but soon his dawning genius begins to open; soon we behold him, a man of mature thought, capable of the most rigid discrimination. In separating truth from error, he discovers the utmost dexterity. To what a vast height of perfection may human nature attain, even in this life! What, then, shall be the state of improvement to which the soul shall arrive, when, armed with wisdom, it shall drink in the knowledge of God, and the fountain of all knowledge? Here we might dwell upon the different employments which shall then engage our hearts and our tongues (employments not inconsistent with rest); the social pleasures, and the mutual delights of the blessed above; but this would exceed our limits.

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is hushed in profound slumber, fit emblem of Death's fearful power. In summer, when Nature is in her full-orbed glory; when fruits and flowers fill the air with their fragrance, and Earth seems a paradise for man. In spring-time, when all Nature is just waking, and from his dreary sleep to new life and vigor, and all is hope and joy. "All seasons are thine, O Death!" Death comes to all ages. To childhood, just smiling into life with all its innocence and glee, around whose future fond affection has woven garlands of honor and fame, as immortal as the soul itself. Blooming maiden, in death behold thy conqueror. Stand beside the lifeless form of youth and beauty; press the kiss of affection upon the marble brow; weep over the grave of the early dead; behold how corruption mars the fair temple. This is thy estate, and this thy sad, inevitable doom. Thy rosy cheek will pale in death; thy sparkling eyes will go out in darkness; thy beautiful form, that bears thee so gracefully amid the gay dance and along the flowery pathway of life, will soon chill beneath Death's icy touch. Earth, with all its beauty; its bright visions and cheering hopes; all the fond memories of the past; all the bright prospects of the future will soon fade in death. "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." Aspiring youth, thou, too, must die; die whilst Earth is one bright and beautiful field of lofty enterprise; whilst ambition's hallowed fires burn within thy soul, and urge thee on to the noble struggle; whilst the laurel of fame are fresh upon thy brow, and thy young, stout heart armed for bolder and nobler effort and a more glorious renown. Man of middle age, already upon the proud eminence of fame; looking out with complacent smile upon thy fields of conflict and triumph; wearing thy laurels with easy grace; and reproach. These, however, are but the negative parts of that happiness. In what the full enjoyment of the soul shall consist, is a question which will not be completely developed, until we shall know even as we are known.

But with reverence, we may draw some inferences from eternal truth, which, at least, throw some light on the subject. In one place it is said, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord; yea, saith the spirit, for they rest from their labors, and their works do follow them." This verse not only declares that a holy life is necessary, to prepare men for the pure and spiritual joys of that high and holy place, but that the rewards of that state shall be proportioned to our advancement in holiness in this life.

This is confirmed by another passage; for, saith St. Paul, "One star differeth from another star in glory; so, also, is the resurrection of the dead;" and, saith Daniel, "they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars, forever and ever." The gradations of rank and of splendor unfold a character of eternal happiness, which are in exact but very imperfectly in this life. We are taught in another place, to contemplate heavenly happiness, in connection with the progressive endowments of the mind; "But we all, as with open face, beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory." It is thought by some, and not without probability, that the apostle refers to the privilege of the Christian, to grow in this world, and that he was drawing the contrast between the dark dispensation of Moses (at whom the children of Israel had to look through a veil), and the clear revelation of eternal truth, under the luminous dispensation of Christ, whose glorious perfections were openly displayed in the gospel, leading the believer from grace to grace, which, in that text, is called "glory," even till he attains that state of perfection, which may, doubtless, be extended to the progression that shall be realized, even in heaven. And how could we contemplate the glories of heaven in a more pleasing point of view?

There is nothing more grateful to the human mind than the idea of progress. There is a degree of delight, in ascending the successive swells of a cloud-capped mountain; there is still more in ascending the steep of moral and intellectual ascent. To the Christian, the state first desired of anything like intellect, but soon his dawning genius begins to open; soon we behold him, a man of mature thought, capable of the most rigid discrimination. In separating truth from error, he discovers the utmost dexterity. To what a vast height of perfection may human nature attain, even in this life! What, then, shall be the state of improvement to which the soul shall arrive, when, armed with wisdom, it shall drink in the knowledge of God, and the fountain of all knowledge? Here we might dwell upon the different employments which shall then engage our hearts and our tongues (employments not inconsistent with rest); the social pleasures, and the mutual delights of the blessed above; but this would exceed our limits.

If the prospect which faith opens to the believer, when he shall have finished his course in this world, be so desirable, that heaven be thus glorious, what folly is it that we should dread to die, and go from hence? On the whole, we may well envy the happiness of the dead, who have died in the Lord; for they, with the utmost propriety, may adopt the well-known verses of the poet:

"I was a strik'den deer, that left the herd  
Long since; with many an angry neigh,  
My pointing sin was charged, when I withdrew,  
To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.  
There I was found by one who had himself  
Been by the archers hit. In his wide bosom,  
With gentle force, he led me to the fold,  
He drew them forth, and healed, and bade me live."

Communications.

For the St. Louis Christian Advocate.

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